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Program helps track on-line visitors

E-BIZ

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Business Week magazine recently reported that about 60 per cent of small businesses don't have a World Wide Web site. That means quite a few entrepreneurs aren't yet convinced of the potential of on-line business.

But what about the other 40 per cent? Do they believe that their Web site is working for them?

Many entrepreneurs have little more than anecdotal evidence as to how many people visit their site. Yet there are a number of questions they should be asking themselves: Do they get many visitors? What pages of information do people look at most frequently? How long do people spend on each page? Are there certain words that people are using in Internet search engines that lead them to that site?

That's where Web log analysis software comes in, programs that produce a number of useful reports pertaining to on-line activity.

First, you need to understand the concept of Web site logs. Every time someone visits a site, the Web server takes note of every page they have looked at. It writes this information into a log file, each line of which provides basic information about the visitor and the page. A log file can contain a wealth of information, but because there is often thousands of lines of data, it is rather useless by itself.

To analyze the log files for my Web site, I use WebTrends by Portland, Ore.-based **WebTrends Corp.**, one of the most popular programs in this category. It's set up so that every day it runs a series of reports.

For example, WebTrends automatically prepares a summary of who visited the site the previous day. I don't know exact names, but in many cases can get a rough idea (through the Internet domain name) of the companies that are spending time at the site and what they are doing there. If a person from the CBC visits my site, WebTrends will let me know that someone from the Internet domain cbc.ca looked at certain pages.

This information can be quite useful. I may find out, for example, that a potential client has spent the previous day reading through some of my on-line brochures.

In other cases, if I am speaking with someone and know that they haven't been on my site recently, I'll direct them to particular Web pages. I usually know whether they have done so within the next few days, and can follow up.

With WebTrends, you can discover which are the most popular pages in your site — and might be surprised by the results. When I began using the program, I found out that a number of on-line marketing sites made reference to an article I had written years ago.

I was getting quite a few visitors from around the world as a result, but these people weren't spending time elsewhere in my site. To encourage them to do so, I added a link from the top of that article to my home page.

As a result, an increasing number of people began to explore the other areas of my site. In one case, I was invited to bid on a project after someone found me this way.

WebTrends also advises what words people have used in various Internet search engines that lead them to my site. I've discovered that many people go on-line looking for speech topics, and that my site often appears at the top of the list. I'm convinced that my Web site is winning me business, and I have the numbers to prove it.

You can try WebTrends out for thirty days for free — simply visit its **www.webtrends.com** Web site. To use the program, the company that hosts your Web site must allow you to access your log files — most of them do. If it doesn't, I suggest you find another company.

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